(c) Steps have initiated to get all the vacancies in the scientific cadre filled up on top priority basis for which the recruitment process is in different stages at the Agricultural Scientists' Recruitment Board (ASRB).

Increasing of alkaline elements in soil

†1. SHRI LALIT KISHORE CHATURVEDI: Will the MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that because of continuous use of chemical fertilizers the quantity of alkaline elements in the soil in most parts of the country is increasing continuously resulting in the decrease in soil fertility;

(b) if so, what measures are being taken to check the same; and

(c) if not, the quantum of increase in production per hectare annually during each of the past five years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) to (c) At present per hectare consumption of the Chemical Fertilizer is 104.5 Kg. This level of consumption of fertilizer does not seem to have any ill effect on soil fertility and its producitivity. Investigations conducted under All India Coordinated Research Project on "Long Term Fertilizer Experiments" over few decades at different locations in the country didn't reveal any such instances. However, Governments is promoting balanced use of fertilizers to maintain soil fertility.

Popularising MSP

2. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) what is Minimum Support Price (MSP) and how the same is fixed and beneficial to the farmers;

(b) whether the report of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) has revealed that almost 71 per cent of farmers had not even heard of the concept of Minimum Support Price (MSP) and almost 81 per cent of farmers were effectively unaware of how to use the MSP; and

(c) if so, the steps taken to generate awareness about MSP operations amongst farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) Minimum Support Price (MSP) is in the nature of a minimum guaranteed price for the farmers offered by the Government for their produce in case the market prices fall below that level. If the market offers higher price than MSP, the farmers are free to sell at that price. The Government announces MSP for specified agricultural commodities on the basis of recommendation of Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP), the views of the State Governments and Central Ministries as well as such other factors considered important for fixation of support prices. The CACP, while formulating its recommendations on price policy considers important factors like cost of production, changes in input prices, productivity of different crops across States, demand supply situation, domestic and international price trends, terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, need for crop diversification, resource use efficiency and food security.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) According to Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in its 59th Round (January-December, 2003), 71 per cent of farmers did not know or understand the concept of Minimum Support Price (MSP). 10 per cent understood what MSP meant but not of the procurement agency. Remaining 19 per cent understood the idea of MSP and also knew the procurement agency.

(c) To create awareness among farmers, support is provided to the States in strengthening extension programmes through schemes like support to State Extension Programmes, Mass Media Support to Agriculture, Kisan Call Centres and Establishment of Agri-Clinic and Agri-Business Centres. Further, these are displayed in the Department's website. Mass Media programmes and exhibition/*Kisan melas*.

Bird flu

3. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the competent authority has taken control measures regarding the outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza outbreak in the north eastern region during the last two months;

(b) if so, the details including the source of outbreak, birds culled and the financial support provided to the poultry farmers/other citizens as on today, category-wise, State-wise; and

(c) if so, the details of H5N1 avian influenza outbreak in various States including the number of birds culled, financial support provided, source of outbreak, total loss due to the outbreak, steps taken to control/prevent further outbreak for the last three years, State-wise, year-wise and category-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI TASLIMUDDIN): (a) Yes Sir. Only one outbreak of avian influenza (H5N1) has been notified in one small unit at Village Chingmeirong of East Imphal District on 25th July, 2007. Control and containment measures were initiated immediately to stamp out and prevent the spread of the disease of poultry. The details are given in the Statement (*See* below).

(b) A committee has been set up to assess the source of infection in the outbreak of avian influenza in Manipur.

More than 3.36 lakhs poultry have been culled during the control operation in Manipur.

Compensation is payable for poultry culled in operations and for destruction of feed and feed materials. More than Rs. 70.00 lakhs has already been paid as compensation in Manipur. The cost of such compensation is shared by the Government of India on a 50:50 basis.

(c) No outbreak from any other State of the North Eastern Region has been reported in the last three years.

Statement

Measures taken to prevent the spread of the diseases

The following measures were taken in Manipur to prevent the spread of avian influenza:

1. Demarcation of infected and surveillance areas was carried out in accordance with the Action Plan. An area of 0-5 kms. was designated as the Infected Zone and a further area of 5-10 kms. was designated as the Surveillance Zone.